

GOOD “OOPS” & “OUCH”

Repairing Relationships Through Healthy Conflict

Mistakes happen in every relationship. What matters most is how we respond.

This practice helps us repair harm quickly and respectfully.

INTENT VS. IMPACT

Intent = What I meant to do

Impact = How it actually affected someone

Both matter.

Someone can mean well and still cause harm.

Someone can be hurt even when harm wasn't intended.

Healthy relationships make space for both.

WHEN YOU'RE HURT: SAY “OUCH”

An “Ouch” signals that something landed poorly without accusing the other person.

A good Ouch includes:

1. Name the impact
“That comment landed hard for me.”
2. Assume positive intent when possible
“I know you probably didn't mean it that way.”
3. Invite repair
“Can we talk about that?”

Example:

“Ouch — when that joke was made earlier, it landed hard for me. I know that might not have been your intent.”

WHEN YOU CAUSED HARM: SAY “OOPS”

A good apology focuses on repairing the relationship.

A strong “Oops” includes:

1. Acknowledge the impact
“I can see that what I said hurt you.”
2. Take responsibility
“That’s on me.”
3. Express genuine regret
“I’m sorry.”
4. Make amends
“How can I repair our relationship?”
“What can I do to make this better?”

Example:

“Oops — I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you, but I can see that it did. Thanks for telling me.”

WHAT DOESN’T HELP

“I’m sorry *if* you were offended.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“You’re being too sensitive.”

“Let’s just move on.”

These protect intent but ignore impact.

REMEMBER

Healthy communities are not conflict-free. They are repair-rich.

We build strong relationships by learning to say:

“Ouch — that hurt.”

and

“Oops — I’m sorry. Let’s repair that.”

CALLING PEOPLE FORWARD

Sometimes repair requires more than saying “Oops” or “Ouch.”
Sometimes we need to help each other grow.

Calling someone forward means inviting them into a better way of relating — without shame, blame, or humiliation.

Calling people out often creates defensiveness.
Calling people in can still feel corrective or private criticism.
Calling people forward focuses on growth, dignity, and repair.

The goal is not punishment.
The goal is transformation and stronger relationships.

BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

1. Center Yourself

Ask:

- “What kind of relationship or community do I want to build?”
- “Do I want to be right, or do I want to repair?”
- “Am I trying to shame someone, or help them grow?”

2. Assume Humanity

Most people do not intend harm.
Even when impact is real, approach the conversation believing the other person can learn and repair.

3. Prepare the Space

Don’t ambush people when emotions are high.

Instead try:

“Can we talk about something that felt important to me?”
“Do you have space for a quick conversation?”

Preparation creates safety.

DURING THE CONVERSATION

4. Start with “I Feel”

Lead with your experience instead of accusations.

Instead of:

“You embarrassed me.”

Try:

“I felt hurt and dismissed in that moment.”

This lowers defensiveness and opens dialogue.

5. Describe the Impact

Be clear and specific about what happened and why it mattered.

“The joke landed hard for me because it reinforced a stereotype I’ve experienced before.”

6. Invite Growth, Not Shame

Focus on the future and the relationship.

“I know you care about people, which is why I wanted to bring this to you.”

“I’d love for us to handle moments like this differently moving forward.”

7. Collaborate on Repair

Ask:

- “How can we move forward from this?”
- “What would repair look like together?”
- “What can help rebuild trust?”

Repair works best when both people participate.

WHAT HELPS

- Staying curious
- Speaking honestly and respectfully
- Naming impact without attacking character
- Leaving room for growth
- Listening as well as speaking

WHAT DOESN'T HELP

- Public humiliation
- Shame or sarcasm
- Assuming bad intent
- Keeping score
- Demanding perfection
- “You always...” or “You never...”

REMEMBER

Healthy communities are not built by avoiding conflict.

They are built by practicing repair, accountability, and growth.

We can say:

“Ouch — that hurt.”

“Oops — I’m sorry.”

and also:

“Let’s move forward together.”

This approach aligns with the original “Oops/Ouch” framework’s emphasis on repair-rich relationships and incorporates key ideas from the “calling forward” model: leading without shame, starting from “I feel,” preparing the space, centering vision, and inviting transformation instead of punishment.

Adapted and developed from a couple of resources:

- [The Four Parts of Accountability & How To Give a Genuine Apology by Mia Mingus](#), in [Leaving Evidence](#), December 18, 2019.
- [Calling People Forward Instead of Out: Ten Essential Steps by Justin Michael Williams and Shelly Tygielski in Nonprofit Quarterly](#), March 4, 2024